

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Of

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As written testimony before the House Veterans Affairs Committee hearings on House Bill HR23 “ A Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007” , I would like to submit the following:

SOME OF MY WW II MERCHANT MARINE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES :

In 1942 I volunteered for service in the Navy, but because of my asthma, I was turned down. This hurt, because most of my buddies at Occidental College were accepted in the Navy. (All those who joined got the GI Bill, even some who never went to sea.) Immediately after being turned down by the Navy I had joined the Merchant Marines through the help of my father who knew the owner of the American Mail Lines as they needed officers for their many ships. Because of my background as an Eagle Scout and 6 years as a student in the Military Academy, I was accepted as an officer in the Merchant Marines. Two weeks later I was proud to be serving my country on a Liberty ship, the SS Brander Matthews, heading for Saipan. I was the youngest officer at the age of 18 in the Merchant Marines. At the end of the war, I was depressed and very disappointed that I was denied the G I Bill which would have helped me pay for college, housing, etc. I was even more upset when I saw that some of my friends, who never served on a ship or never were in any danger because of the war, got the G I Bill.

These were the ships on which I served during WW II:

SS Samuel Parker which received the Gallant Ship Award by President Roosevelt for taking 300 tanks from America to Africa to help get General Rommel out of Africa during which time the ship shot down 2 German dive bombers.

SS Brander Matthews which left Pearl Harbor with 500 Torpedoes and a shipload of ammunition. We traveled under Australia to avoid Japanese Submarines. We heard that a Merchant Marine ship one day ahead of us was sunk by a Japanese submarine whereupon the Japanese then rescued 42 Americans. However, only one American Merchant Mariner of those 42 rescued prisoners aboard the Japanese submarine was subsequently rescued by an American Navy destroyer the next day. His story, as told to the Captain of this American destroyer, was that one by one each rescued Merchant Mariner from his ship had his head chopped off by a Japanese Samurai Sword prompting this Merchant Mariner to jump into the sea and hide under the submarine. It could have been our ship. We all felt we had a close call.

Again on the SS Brander Matthews, we hit a tremendous typhoon in the Mozambique Channel off Africa. The ship was listing 34 degrees with much damage to the ship when our jumbo boom block broke loose repeatedly smashing the decks. Fearing we would sink, we sent men out on deck with ropes to lasso the block. Those brave men saved the ship. Again a close call, but I dismissed the fear by thinking that I was proud to be serving my country.

In 1944 I was in the 21st General Hospital in Bari Italy due to "battle fatigue". There were four U.S. Merchant Marine ammunition ships in the Harbor near us. I

remember thinking, "These ships might be attacked and we would all die." The day after I left Italy, the Germans bombed that harbor blowing up the 4 ammunition ships. One of those 4 ships was carrying chlorine gas and some 2500 people were killed.

Again on a Tanker, the SS Elk Basin, carrying a large dangerous cargo of gasoline to the Philippines, we were all apprehensive sensing danger. No one was allowed to even smoke. This experience again caused me great distress and anxiety.

Considering it all, these were only a few of the many events that caused me great distress. Then to come home and find out that Merchant Mariners alone were singled out to be denied our proper recognition as heroes. We were the Forgotten Heroes of WW II. On top of that I had to face my buddies, who never even went to serve in the war, and yet did get the G I Bill which I and some 220, 000 others in the Merchant Marines were denied. Our brave Merchant Mariners suffered the highest casualty rate in WW II with the Marine Corps a close second.

Please. Let's finally honor all these brave men, now near the end of their lives, by voting to pass this bill.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dean Beaumont

P.S. There are many more stories in the book titled "THE FORGOTTEN HEROES:
THE HEROIC STORY OF THE UNITED STATES MERCHANT MARINE" by Brian
Herbert published in 2004